

FAQs About

Special Education and Reading First

This list of frequently asked questions is intended to provide clarification of policies concerning Reading First and special education. The reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) and programs such as Reading First have raised many questions about the role of the general educator and the special educator. High-quality instructional services depend on general educators and special educators collaborating to provide access to the general education curriculum for all students. Hopefully, this clarification of the opportunities available for special education staff and regular education staff to collaborate with each other in the implementation of Reading First programs will support flexible approaches to instructional delivery. Ultimately, we hope that this will improve student reading performance and close achievement gaps.

1. Can special education personnel provide support or instruction for general education students in general education settings?

Yes. Special education personnel may provide support or instruction for general education students in general education settings.

Special education teachers who obtain their teaching degree in Montana are usually licensed as general education teachers with an endorsement in special education. Special education teachers holding a general education teaching license are fully qualified to teach general education classes. If a special education teacher is certified as an elementary education teacher with an endorsement in special education, the special education teacher is fully qualified to teach any subject in any elementary grade.

See questions number seven, eight, and nine for clarifications on funding.

2. Can general education students receive instruction in a special education classroom?

Yes. General education students may receive instruction in a special education classroom. There are no regulations that specify where instruction should be provided for special education or general education students. Therefore, it does not matter where the physical space is in which instruction takes place. However, we do need to keep in mind that there may be different perceptions from the school community (parents, other children, staff, visitors, etc...) about the settings in which additional services are provided. For this reason, clear communication with parents is important and they should be notified whenever a student is receiving additional instruction outside the student's regular classroom setting.

3. When special education personnel provide support or instruction for groups of students in the general education classroom is there a limit to the group size he/she can work with?

There is no numerical limit on the number of students a special education teacher can work with as long as the instruction provided is meeting the service requirements in each student's IEP. Special education teachers are required to ensure that each child's IEP is fully implemented. If the size of the group is so large that the services in each special education student's IEP are not being implemented, then the district would be out of compliance and would need to review its staffing level to ensure each student's IEP is being implemented.

4. Can special education students be removed from the 90-minute reading block to work on Individual Education Program (IEP) goals?

Yes. Students can be removed from general education programs such as Reading First for the purpose of providing services outlined in the student's IEP. Schools are required to implement the IEP as written and this could include the 90-minute reading block.

It is important to keep in mind that the effectiveness of the student's reading program may be dependent upon full participation in the 90-minute reading block. When appropriate, IEP teams should develop the student's IEP so that it is not necessary for the student to be removed from the 90-minute reading block and special education instruction should be provided in addition to the 90-minute reading block.

5. What is the standard procedure for determining when a replacement core reading program is needed for a student on an IEP?

The decision to provide a replacement program, such as a reading program for students with disabilities, is made by the IEP team. The IEP team uses evaluation information, observation, and parent input to determine the education program needs of each student. This determination includes whether the child's general education program would be replaced with special education services or whether the special education program would supplement the general education services.

The decision to provide a replacement core reading program for a student in a Reading First school is usually made by the reading leadership team or the grade level team. When determining whether a student would benefit from a replacement core reading program it is recommended that the decision be based on careful assessment of student progress and the goals outlined in the student's IEP.

A comprehensive intervention program should be in place for intensive students before a replacement core program is recommended. These intervention programs should provide additional instruction outside the core program that would accelerate reading progress beyond one year's growth in one year's time in order to close achievement gaps. A comprehensive intervention program includes explicit instructional strategies, coordinated instructional sequences, ample practice opportunities, and aligned student materials. These programs also provide more frequent assessments of student progress and more systematic review in order to ensure proper pacing of instruction and mastery of all instructional components. When additional intervention instruction has been in place for a six-week period of time or more and the student continues to make inadequate progress a replacement core program may need to be recommended. Keep in mind that this would be a very small percentage of students within a school.

6. Should schools implementing RTI and Reading First use grade levels or instructional levels when they are progress monitoring?

State and federal special education regulations do not address the use of grade level or instructional level when conducting progress monitoring. Generally, schools would be advised to be consistent with the type of level used for progress monitoring.

7. How should expenditures be reported when special education teachers and related service providers work with general education students?

As a general rule, a special education teacher or related service provider providing reading instruction to a group of students is not an allowable special education cost, unless the instruction is uniquely designed and specifically provided for the purpose of meeting the goals and objectives of an IEP for a student with disabilities. State special education funds and IDEA Part B and Preschool funds can only be used to provide special education services included in an IEP. Special education allowable costs are defined in the following administrative rules of Montana: 10.16.3806 and 10.16.3807.

Special education teachers or related service personnel providing services or assisting with instruction to only general education students is not an allowable special education cost and must be reported as a general education cost.

NOTE: With prior approval of the Office of Public Instruction, a district may use a portion of their IDEA Part B allocation for providing Early Intervening Services to at-risk (general education) students, in accord with the requirements under IDEA (34 CFR 300.226). In such a case, the district must report the expenditure of the funds in accord with the accounting principles as described and provided to the district when approval for such expenditures is given by the OPI.

8. Is there a limit on the amount of time a special education teacher can spend in providing Reading First instruction?

If the costs associated with providing Reading First instruction are reported as a general education expenditure and not a special education expenditure, then there are no limitations on the amount of time a special education teacher can provide Reading First instruction.

9. Is there any circumstance where a special education teacher's time spent providing Reading First instruction could be considered a special education allowable cost?

Under a limited set of conditions a special education teacher's time providing reading instruction, including instruction provided during the classic 90-minute Reading First block, may be considered a special education allowable cost even though students without disabilities are included in the group. For the teacher's time spent in providing Reading First instruction to be considered a special education allowable cost, the focus of the instruction must be on the implementation of an IEP for one or more students with disabilities. However, it should be noted that the IEP(s) must be developed around the unique reading needs of the student(s) with disabilities. If the focus of the instruction provided by the special education teacher is implementation of the IEP for the student(s) with disabilities,

students without disabilities may be present during this instruction and the time and effort of the teacher is still considered an allowable special education cost.

If a special education teacher is implementing a district's curriculum that is provided in the same manner for all students, the instruction is considered general education instruction and is not considered a special education allowable cost, even if all the students receiving the instruction happen to be students with disabilities.

The reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) became effective on July 1, 2005. This list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) sheet is one of a series from the Montana Office of Public Instruction which highlight changes resulting from the reauthorization of the IDEA. Additional changes may result from the final regulations.

If you have further questions, please contact your local special education director or the Montana Office of Public Instruction. A complete listing of current OPI IDEA FAQs can be found at opi.mt.gov/speced/faq.html.



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